

DEPARTMENT OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

1220 N Street, Room 409
Sacramento, CA 95814



June 30, 1998

Mr. Leo Winternitz, Chief
Compliance and Monitoring Branch
Environmental Services Branch
California Department of Water Resources
3251 S Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Prospect Island. Response to letter of June 10, 1998

Dear Mr. Winternitz:

Thank you for the FAX of the June 10 letter regarding Prospect Island. This letter has a number of issues which I feel need to be addressed:

First, the Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) model clearly shows that a fair argument can be made that the proposed project could have adverse impacts on the existing environment. The LESA model was developed to assess impacts on agricultural resources, not goals of agricultural land conversion.

Second, the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) does not agree that the proposed conversion of this agricultural land to engineered artificial habitat is less intensive than continued agricultural use. Even if it is less intensive, this is not relevant. The point is that significant attributes of the existing environment will be destroyed by the project. Balancing the goals of a development project such as this against the unmitigated adverse impacts on the existing environment is accomplished in formal findings in support of a Statement of Overriding Considerations, after completion of an adequate Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

*CDFA -
We do not
agree that the
project has
adverse impact
on agriculture*

Third, the proposed project will very likely consume more water, not less than agricultural use of the same land. Open water and shallow water emergent vegetation wetlands consume more water than most other uses. This must be quantified. Also, the simple fact that the water is being redirected away from agricultural use is itself a potentially significant adverse impact. The new purpose of use is less important than the loss of the resource to agriculture. Again, the weighing of benefits against adverse impacts requires an adequate EIR. ?

*reducing an
environment
that is more
than Ag land does
create an EIR.
people +
smaller
considered a*

Fourth, it is by no means clear that adjacent agricultural uses will not be impacted by construction and operation of the proposed project. This issue merits serious study and possibly mitigation in design and operation of the proposed project.

*...ing impact
to environment.
The amount of benefit
... the need for mi
... about the
... (end)*

Fifth, Prospect Island has flooded periodically. Periodic flooding and agricultural use are highly compatible, especially when, as in the case of Prospect Island, the system is designed and operated with this in mind. The difficulties which the United States Bureau of Reclamation has had, as reflected in their costs are not necessarily indicative of the costs of stewardship to a private owner. The statements at the end of the first paragraph on page two of the June 10, 1998 letter are conjecture, although these do merit study.

Sixth, the significance of the proposed Prospect Island project must be viewed in the context of past, present, and reasonably anticipated future projects and programs by the Lead Agency and other agencies which also have the potential to impact attributes of the existing environment related to agriculture. Cumulative impact analysis is essential.

Seventh, one of the lessons of Prospect Island is that the environmental analysis required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) should have been complete prior to land acquisition and commitment of funding to the project.

land can be sold

In conclusion, weighing project goals and objective against potentially significant adverse impacts on the existing environment, which includes human use of the land for agriculture, requires an EIR. Proceeding with this proposed project on the basis of a Negative Declaration, without mitigation of the potential impacts to insignificance, is inappropriate. If you wish to work to develop the scope of an EIR, or work towards a Mitigated Negative Declaration, the CDFA, as the State agency responsible for agricultural resources, is available to assist. If you have any questions, please call me at (916) 323-7280.

Sincerely,



Robin Reynolds
Environmental Program Manager